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THE POSITION OF WOMAN.—III.

EXPANDING ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN AMERICA AND ENGLAND.

BY THE DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH.

A CERTAIN purposelessness and want of union have prevented woman achieving an equal place with man in activities of a commercial or political nature. Especially in the middle and upper classes, where woman's duties are reduced to overseeing, woman is in danger of becoming a more or less useless companion to man. And in the lower classes, where woman has been forced to seek work in the labor market of the world, what has she achieved there? Here her want of union, her inability to co-operate, have had even more disastrous results. The young girls dependent on their fathers, but anxious to earn a few shillings to enrich their wardrobes, the mothers pressed to increase the husband's meagre earnings in order to support a large family, have joined the great army of labor not on equal or even just terms. In eager haste and driving fear, they have sold their work at half its worth and in blind perversity hastened to undo their own ends by underselling man's work and lowering the standard of wages. When some of the more intelligent, realizing what they had done, tried to form trade-unions, they met with resistance and incapacity everywhere; and it was only by calling in man's aid and in many cases joining his unions that woman learned to protect her industrial value. Even now, how low it is rated notwithstanding that woman's work is, in trades and industries suited to a woman, quite as good as man's, if not better.

The first beginnings of Trade-Unionism among women in England took place in 1874, and the founder, Mrs. Emma Paterson, went to America and found out for herself how Women's

Trade-Unions and Friendly Societies, already successfully started in that country, operated. She came back fully resolved to do something to improve the conditions under which women labored in her own country, and began by publishing a paper in the "Labor News." Before her death, in 1886, she had succeeded in firmly establishing the principle that woman must unite to protect their interests, and in placing this truth on the practical foundation of Trade-Unionism. It still remains a problem how to induce women to fight for their rights. They have been in a subservient and irresponsible position for so long that they have come to accept whatever is sent them with a philosophical calm and lethargic indifference almost impossible to rouse. The writer has herself visited Clubs in the East End of London, composed of girls working in factories, where they earned a miserable pittance and worked from eight to twelve hours a day. When she tried to impress on them that these were not fit conditions for their acceptance, and that their Club should become a co-operative union to resist unjust terms, instead of being merely a social centre, they smiled hopelessly as if at some wild but yet pleasant fancy and returned to the dreary monotony of things as they were and would to them remain. It takes something more than mere environment to account for such hopelessness; it is hereditary, instinctive and unreasoned. We have seen to some extent the primary causes that account for woman's lack of initiative outside her home; we have seen her more and more confined to her activities by man's assumption of labor and control; we have watched her outbreaks of energy, always occurring when a freer education had stimulated her moral activities, or man had tried to withhold a prerogative she had learned to enjoy. We have noticed that she has not been slow to avail herself of moments of confusion, or movements heralding reform, to press her own cause. We know also that the present time is one of unequalled activity among women, that in science, law, metaphysics, medicine, industry, political economy and politics, women are rising to the foremost ranks. More especially in England, where women outnumber men by the terrible majority of a million and a half, do we find the fight for political franchise and the assertion of equality it implicates at its height. Here women are at last uniting in one great determined body to insist upon the completion of

that long march towards the gates of freedom begun by women insidiously, furtively, individually at first, but now in a body, openly, courageously and like men. It is because womanly measures have failed to open the gates that they have resorted to more masculine ones. Not because they enjoy going to prison or making themselves objectionable, but because they know that no great reform has ever been brought about without public agitation of a more or less aggressive character on the part of those directly concerned.

If you have a sore and hide it, you are not likely to be admitted into a hospital; if you have a grievance and do not ventilate it, you are not likely to meet with redress. What type of woman is it that furnishes these would-be reformers? Is it the lower class—patient, hard-working, almost mechanical in its suffering and endurance? No, for they have not the time to spare, nor the imagination to appreciate the rights that some day will accrue to them. Is it the upper class, wasteful of opportunity, contented in their surroundings and but half-awake to the great purpose, passing it by? No, for they are too fearful of the world's reprobation, too satisfied with their own conditions and too engrossed in self-culture and self-ease to do more than discuss the probability of eventual success or failure. And so, unlike the Roman matrons of patrician descent, it is not England's aristocracy that claims a senate, or the right to vote. It is indicative of the times and the nation's thought that it is the great class of intelligent, independent and successful earners of salaries who are leading this movement—women who have entered into dignified professions, who are leading honorable lives, independent and self-supporting, women who are householders and taxpayers, and whose eminent capability and judgment render them efficient controllers of the right of citizenship. These are the women who are suffering imprisonment and ridicule for the sake of a right they deem in justice due, not only to themselves, but to the great class of struggling, suffering, unvoiced womanhood, too weak to cry out, too downtrodden to rebel, too uneducated to understand, but not too insensitive to suffer. For those women now crowding the public houses to find forgetfulness in drink; for those women condemned to a vicious, shameless life; for those underpaid, underfed, overworked, that congest the labor market and undersell their work; for those

unprotected, uncared for, degraded and abused—those are the ones they go to prison for, that their legislation as women for women may some day redeem their unfortunate sisters. And thus it would seem that the responsibility of work had wakened in woman a purpose and an incentive not known to her more indolent sister.

Turned from the adventitious character of the pretty proselyte whose unavowed object is no other than marriage and whose purpose in life ends with marriage, the serious woman has established a goal less personal and less selfish. Not that we would decry marriage as a laudable and commendable goal; but life does not end with its attainment as fairy-tales would make us believe. Woman's real life and purpose more often begin after marriage than before, and it is the choice of such an aim that this article would wish to stimulate. Domestic requirements no longer sufficiently employ either the modern woman's time or her intellect. We are now speaking of the woman who has servants to accomplish what in former days used to be her duty. Neither do children fill up her leisure. Public and private schools, governesses and tutors, have taken away one of woman's most sacred duties. She can still supervise her household and the education of her children, giving that *coup d'œil de maître* and bestowing the mother's influence none other can equal; but her time is not filled, and failing a more serious interest, a fussy attention to small details will monopolize her mind. And this is what many brilliant women are apt to degenerate into from lack of opportunity and purpose. In England, where class obligations exist and women have been brought up with a sense of responsibility towards society, the duties imposed upon her are of a various nature. There are, in the first place, the responsibilities incumbent upon the chatelaine of a country place, remnants of feudal obligations.

Her duties are many and varied, from the distribution of blankets and coal in winter to the entertainment of school children in summer. Again, she is the natural head of all the village organizations, the club-rooms, nursing association, beekeeping society, flower-shows, etc. If endowed with the ability to organize she will probably play a leading part in the charitable enterprises of her county. She will have to attend and preside at numberless meetings, flower-shows and bazars, visit hospitals and workhouses, care for the poor and destitute, and get to

know every one, and his and her wants individually, and may still incur the gentle rebuke of an old blind widow, "You have not been to read to me for a long time, and I have missed you sadly." Perhaps a rebuke, and yet what a gracious compliment! With an education such as this, it is readily understood that an English girl brought up in her country home must have some conception of what duty to her neighbor means, and if she does not live up to it an attendant unpopularity will be hers.

In London itself, the requirements are less direct, but political leagues, charitable associations, hospital committees and the hundred and one appeals continually launched for financial aid and personal influence give every one a chance of serving public utility. The wife of a Member of Parliament is expected to discharge all sorts of duties, political, charitable and ornamental, for the constituency regard her as their own bright star and bottle-washer combined. Of late years, the fashion for women to speak when presiding at bazars, prize-givings and political functions, has become general, and a woman who declines to "say a few words" is looked upon as depriving the audience of a right of criticism which is now part of the day's amusement.

Debating societies, lectures on "how to take the chair," "the tricks to avoid when speaking," "what not to do with your hands when on your feet," have become part of the curriculum of the woman of the world. Women's clubs, political leagues, debates, lectures, fill many a day. Many women have a pet charity or institution dependent on their exertions, and that takes time and thought to keep it going. In fact, a woman who wishes to find an outlet for her energies enjoys every opportunity; the only danger is that she may take up too many interests, so that with multiplied and divergent claims she may be unable to further any one in particular. Again, a real objective must be kept in view, and the interests most adapted to her position or individual capacity should be the ones to command her attention. It is just as needful for a society woman to specialize in her interests as it is for a woman practising a profession to confine herself to its scope. In these days of specialized effort, one cannot be a Jill of all trades nor a finished performer on more than one instrument. One can, of a truth, be the patroness of all good objects, or the patron saint of all virtuous talent,

but this is at the best a negative function, and unless individual effort and thought are put into every scheme or work, it counts for little in the end.

The difference in the field of activities of an American compared to that of an English woman are thus very marked at the outset. In England, the channels of activity were dug centuries ago, and the course of time has but broadened their bed. If with the expanding sphere of woman's influence new tributaries are flowing into these channels along with the old ones, they all trace back to the same source—woman's willingness to co-operate with man in sharing the responsibilities as well as the benefits organization confers. Man has trained woman in the older country, and if she is now outstripping the limitation he has marked for her, it is because the time is ripe for her to conquer new territories. Woman's political activity is but an outcome and a corollary to the problems of industrial competition she has had to encounter, and an adjustment to the new activities her economic position as an independent wage-earner has insured. With her independence have come new liabilities, with her liabilities the desire for equal protection—a protection that can only be secured by a voice in the Government she helps to maintain. There is no doubt that questions affecting her immediate surroundings are best left in her hands. In primitive times, woman, as we have seen, controlled all domestic questions. Thus questions of sanitation affecting food-supplies, milk, water, drains and ventilation, questions concerning the education of children, their employment in factories, the regulations regarding the employment of women, the administration of relief to the poor, would be better and more effectively dealt with by women than by men. And in time such matters will no doubt be controlled by boards composed of women. Practice is, however, necessary before execution, and all women would do well to prepare themselves for this eventuality.

In America we have the advantage, as well as the drawback, that accompanies the absence of the well-marked rut of precedent. Here Society can recognize its own obligations and launch into fields of endeavor, not wider, perhaps, but capable of more scientific treatment, of more economical efficiency and of yielding more practical results. Unhampered by conservatism and prejudice, practical philanthropy is walking hand in hand with applied

science, and woman's sphere of utility attains undreamed-of proportions. There has never been a time when the State was more willing to help private endeavor of a philanthropic nature; is not this also a door to more intimate knowledge with those departments of public affairs woman will in time want to control? Besides the great philanthropic work open to woman in America, there is the province of politics which she has not yet touched. Her reasons for abstaining from contaminating herself with anything so sordid have been amply demonstrated, and there is no doubt that to a certain extent the element of the so-called professional politician has been a deterrent to her influence. But woman's office is to elevate—her presence to purify—and the day is not far distant when woman's influence in politics will be wanted. The selfish boss, possessing unlimited power and recognizing no responsibility; the wire-pullers, unscrupulous because of their unknown identity; the political scavengers that haunt every office—all will in time recede before the true and self-respecting representatives of the people. With the election of disinterested and scrupulous men to the minor legislative bodies the people will resume the control and direction of their own affairs, and it is for woman to help to bring about such a result. Woman's influence must first find its way through indirect channels. Merely to encourage husband or brother to enter the political arena is the first step. The second comes almost naturally—to go to his meetings, to help him in his campaign; to interest oneself in his business and in the welfare of the thousands of employees he may have working in his factories; to provide clubs for them, and reading-rooms; to have meetings of a social nature for their wives where politics will gradually come to be discussed in the proper spirit and in the right light. All this done as a friend, not as an interloper or generous patroness, tends to create the good feeling between employer and employed that should by right exist if each is doing his best. Many tell one that such a course in America is impossible, that the men are too independent and would resent interference. But if made in the right way, men do not resent, but welcome, any effort on the part of the employer, animated by the feeling of brotherhood, to get into touch with their point of view. The socialistic fallacy dinned into their ears that what is good for the employer is bad for them, and

vice versa, must succumb before such direct appeal. There are certain public duties belonging to every position in life, and the mere fact of citizenship holds a responsibility for every unit in the State which it should be his pride to discharge. Women are citizens too, and if they aspire to the privileges the status confers they must learn to live up to its responsibilities. If such views were held by the rich as well as by those numbers of women who so willingly work in the service of the State, arraignments malicious, unjust and libellous such as are written against society now would lose every little semblance of verity they possess. Mr. Upton Sinclair could no longer wield the stinging lash of his rather meretricious invective, nor vaunt his never-failing panacea of socialism. Here is an opportunity for American women to win the praise their intelligence and ability have so often called forth. There is every sign that at the present moment a disintegrating force is at work undermining public confidence and frightening the lethargy of those who seemed secure. Whatever this force may spring from, its presence cannot be ignored, and is a danger to the community unless directed into channels of systematized reform. It is useless to meet a great problem with hasty and ill-prepared mind, it is equally futile to stem a steady current with a dam whose foundation is not solid. The socialist propaganda has been called to life in a large measure by the neglect of some of those who occupy prominent positions to recognize the tremendous responsibility that wealth has placed on their shoulders. Unscrupulous platform orators and writers have held these up to public scorn, neglecting to mention the good deeds of those whose conscience is proportionate to their means.

There is no doubt that to administer charities successfully so as to create the greatest preponderance of utility is a difficult task and one worthy of the consideration of the soundest and most capable brains. There is also no doubt that the responsibilities of great wealth are often puzzling, discouraging and strenuous. But the work of administering a fortune fairly in providing for personal requirements and in furthering reproductive schemes, is one of intense interest, and one that may well fall to the women in America, where men leave so much of the distribution of wealth in their hands.

It is an administration which demands the closest personal

attention in order to succeed in its aim. The mere fact of handing \$100,000 to an institution does not constitute a recognition of such a responsibility. It is, on the contrary, an open invitation to others to accept that responsibility. The writer believes that specialized effort should be woman's purpose, and that, in thus advancing socialism in its most favorable aspect she would create an ideal worthy of a unity of purpose—the socialistic ideal being for every member of the community to have a given task and an appointed place in the working of the great state machinery. That this task should be suitable to the individual's mental and physical capacity is their contention. Why should not women then take this ideal and make it their purpose in life? Motherhood, as we have seen, covers but a small period of a woman's existence. There are, therefore, many hours spent in futile endeavors to make the time pass, in self-culture, sports, frivolities, psychological experiences, often dangerous and exhaustive, and much money, time and energy is spent in rounds of expensive and luxurious entertaining, that leave her empty and disheartened at the end. Why not live life scientifically, the best suited for the given task? And by the best suited is not only meant the most mentally gifted, but the best suited in position, opportunity, wealth and capabilities—in fact, the socialist ideal personally adapted and lived up to. When a woman has to work for her living, she naturally adapts herself to her environment and calls out whatever strain in her own nature most readily responds to it, and then chooses a profession and mode of life accordingly. The writer's point is that women who are not obliged to work for a living should work in one way or another, either politically, artistically or philanthropically, but always personally, with the avowed purpose of living up to the responsibility fate has imposed upon them. We have seen how, without purpose, the women of the past grew disorganized and lost all aim in life, drifting into that adventitious position that prevents the accomplishment of any real reform. Let women, therefore, unite in purpose, and let their purpose be the recognition of those higher responsibilities we owe the State, so that when the time of realization dawns we may not be unprepared to accept those duties and cares the rights of citizenship will involve.